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SUBJECT: JORDAN STARTS SHIFT TO UNLEADED GASOLINE

REF: A. Amman 407

[¶](#)B. Amman 296

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[¶](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Jordan has begun implementation of a long-awaited decision to switch from regular to unleaded fuel, a change that officially went into effect February 8 when the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC) announced it had stopped providing gas stations with leaded fuel. The Government of Jordan (GoJ) is now providing two types of unleaded gasoline (90- and 95-octane); meanwhile regular gasoline (88-octane) is being completely phased out over the next few weeks. Jordan's shift to unleaded fuel is in response to increasing awareness of the health and environmental impact of leaded fuel. With the shift there are also two new, related requirements: all imported cars must have catalytic converters, and the adoption of U.S. standards for imported gasoline storage tanks. End Summary.

Inter-Ministerial Cooperation Leads to New Policy

[¶](#)2. (SBU) In mid-2006, the GoJ issued a decision stipulating that Jordan switch to unleaded fuel usage by 2008. The ministries of environment (MOENV), water and irrigation (MWI), and energy and mineral resources (MEMR); the Jordanian Petroleum Refinery Company (JPRC); the Gas Stations Owners Association (GSOA); and the Jordan Institution for Standards and Measurements (JISM) further agreed on a plan to reduce leaded petrol by 70 percent in 2007, with the goal of a complete shift to unleaded gas in 2008. The 2007 target was not achieved due to the Jordan Petroleum Refinery Company's (JPRC) inability to produce sufficient quantities of unleaded fuel. Now ready to provide the Kingdom's petrol stations with unleaded fuel, JPRC has increased production of unleaded petrol and stopped production of regular leaded gasoline.

[¶](#)3. (U) Before proceeding with the change, however, MWI formed a technical committee in 2007 to study and follow up on the negative effects of MTBE (methyl tert-butyl ether), a substance contained in unleaded fuel, to make sure MTBE would not seep into any nearby underground water resources. Some of the committee findings indicated that if the storage tanks were of sufficient quality, MTBE, a volatile, flammable and colorless liquid that is relatively

soluble in water, would not affect the underground water. NOTE: In 2006, the USG organized a regional workshop in Istanbul on detecting and preventing leaks from underground petroleum storage tanks. Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Israel each sent representatives to the seminar. END NOTE.

¶4. (U) Jordan's shift to unleaded fuel comes amid international recognition that short-term exposure to high levels of lead can result in brain and kidney damage, while extended exposure could affect the blood and central nervous systems, blood pressure, kidneys, and the body's ability to metabolize vitamin D. Lead exposure is most serious for young children because they absorb lead more easily than adults and are more susceptible to its harmful effects. The MOENV continues to monitor the effects of leaded fuel.

A Comprehensive Transition Process

¶5. (SBU) The GoJ gave gas stations until February 22 to deplete their stocks of leaded fuel. JPRC CEO Ahmed Refai told Econoff on February 21 that JPRC began the process of moving to unleaded gas through a soft launch by providing gas stations with more unleaded fuel, an approach which helped the transition go smoothly. Following approval of the 2008 budget and subsequent lift of fuel subsidies, JPRC formally announced the switch (refuels). Gas stations are now selling 95-octane unleaded fuel at about \$0.93/liter (\$3.44/gallon) and 90-octane fuel at \$0.810/liter (\$3.06/gallon), an average increase of 6 percent.

¶6. (SBU) In addition to making the switch to unleaded fuel, JISM adopted 38 U.S. standards related to petroleum equipment, and has requested the Jordan Customs Department and the Public Security Directorate verify that all imported vehicles are fitted with catalytic converters. JISM Director Dr. Yaseen Khayyat previously told ESTH officer that imported cars often had their catalytic converters removed so drivers could use the cheaper leaded petrol. Minister of Environment Khaled Irani relayed to ESTH officer that the majority of cars in Jordan that currently do not have catalytic converters will be able to use unleaded fuel, although their emissions would not be on par with cars having catalytic converters.

¶7. (U) According to Dr. Khayyat, JSIM has prepared a comprehensive surveillance plan for gas stations to confirm compliance with new regulations. To realize this plan, JISM has employed 43 individuals (30 in Amman, 5 in the southern governorates, and 8 in the northern governorate). The MOENV, MEMR, and GSOA are also working together to determine whether gas stations' underground storage tanks are clean and in compliance. According to JPRC, gas station owners will be responsible for replacing all fuel tanks that do not meet the required standards. The new tanks will be insulated with double-walls; old tanks that meet the new specifications will be cleaned and refilled with unleaded gasoline after the leaded fuel is pumped out.

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